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Times Photos by Todd Dudek

Janet Dudley-Eshbach, president of Salisbury University, speaks during the university's Multiethnic Visitation Weekend to a group of minority students that are considering going to SU.

DIVERSITY: SU increases minority enrollment

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quality of the university.

"It would be a threat to a number of programs on campus. It would be a question of our ability to deliver excellent theater programs, student government leadership. Basically, you don't want an entire student body to look all the same," she said.

Dane said administrators use a holistic approach in reviewing applications, taking into account all the qualities a prospective student offers.

"We don't use a point system or formula. We don't have a scale," said Dane, who maintains that SU applies a broad definition of diversity.

"It's not strictly ethnic," she said.

Still, university data shows a gap between white and black SU students in SAT scores.

In 2002, the average SAT score of incoming black freshmen at SU was 994. For whites, the average score was 1142, according to the Office of Institutional Assessment, Research and Accountability.

Division

The debate on affirmative action has been volatile and generally divides along racial and political lines. Recent polls show that a majority of Americans oppose race preferences in college admissions and support President Bush's opposition to the University of Michigan's policy.

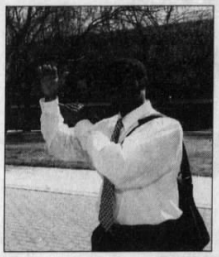
Joseph Purcell, an SU junior from Philadelphia, said colleges should only consider the academic credentials of students when granting admission.

"It should be about qualifications and the whole person, not what race a person is," he said. "We need to get beyond race. It's not a white, black issue. It's about who is qualified whatever race they are."

Justin Ready, an SU junior political science major, said there are better ways to achieve diversity than the method used by the University of Michigan.

"Using quotas doesn't seem like a fair way to do it," he said. "I don't think the problem is so much a racial divide. It's an income divide."

Michigan's undergraduate policy is based on a 150-point scale.



Darren Jackson, Salisbury University senior and former president of the campus chapter of the NAACP, reflects on how diversity on campus has changed.

Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans receive 20 points towards the total, while white and Asian students do not. Conversely, a perfect score on the SAT is worth 12 points and writing an outstanding essay one point.

Ready said students who come from poor backgrounds that excel in underfunded high schools, for example, should be given preferential treatment.

Senior Darren Jackson, a marketing major and past president of the campus chapter of the NAACP, said that while progress has been made, affirmative action policies need to be maintained.

"Preferential treatment has been around a long time, but nobody talks about it unless it's a minority student that benefits," he said. "Race shouldn't be the only factor, but one of many factors. The whole person needs to be reviewed."

Brendan Dawson, an SU junior from West Chester, Pa., said it is important for universities to carry out policies that achieve greater racial balance on campuses.

"I think race definitely needs to be a consideration. In the inner city, students don't have access to the same opportunities that students in the suburbs have," he said. "At Salisbury, I've seen more diversity on campus in the last couple of years, which is a good thing."

Campus Life

Though minority enrollment at SU has grown, Eshbach said the campus still is far from matching the racial demographics of Maryland, where blacks make up 28 percent of the population statewide.

"It's been a 180-degree chance since I was freshman. When I came here there was nothing to do. Now, more people are hanging out together and there are more diverse programs."

Darren Jackson
SU senior and past president of the campus chapter of the NAACP

"I know for a fact it's a lonely place if you are the only African American or Hispanic in a class of 30 people. We're looking at the supports we have for students, but we have a long way to go," she said.

Since his days as a freshman, Jackson says campus life has improved for minorities. He said many students have found their niche despite being under-represented.

"It's been a 180-degree change since I was a freshman. When I came here there was nothing to do," Jackson said. "Now, more people are hanging out together and there are more diverse programs."

Though the university has become more integrated, there are still issues that need to be resolved, he said.

In the fall of 2001, 25.8 percent of black freshmen did not return to the university the following school year, compared to 18.7 percent of all other first-year students.

Black student leaders also say they are disappointed by Eshbach's decision to eliminate two administrative positions held by black personnel. The layoffs where part of a restructuring initiative provoked by a multi-million dollar cut in state funding. A total of 16 administrative positions were eliminated in the process.

"We are for the president, we just question why she would cut two of the seven African American (administrators) ... That raised a lot of eyebrows," Jackson said.

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